DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 171 389 PS 010 593

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TITLE Survey of Staff Preparation for Infant/Toddler Development Programs.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Care Workers; Credentials; *Educational Background; *Educational Needs; Infants; *Personnel Evaluation; Preschool Education; Skills; Staff Improvement; *Training
IDENTIFIERS California (Los Angeles)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey the agencies and individuals presently conducting infant/toddler development (ITD) programs in the Los Angeles County area to determine whether the agencies were operated by public or private organizations; the educational background of the individuals staffing these programs and the respondents' recommendations regarding the educational level, competencies and academic preparation required by individuals desiring careers in the ITD field. A questionnaire was developed and sent to 186 agencies listed in the "Infant Program Directory of the Los Angeles Area," "Prenatal and Neonatal Programs in the San Fernando Valley" and bulletins of other agencies or institutes believed to be involved in ITD programs. Those responding and retained in the analysis (n=93) were divided almost equally between public (49%) and private (51%) agencies. Among the results: 33% of the individuals responding had a 4-year college degree, 60% held a graduate degree, 2% held a high school diploma, and 5% held a community college degree; 78% suggested that the educational background needed to enter that field should be a 4-year college degree or a graduate degree, while 13% indicated a 2-year community college degree, and 10% emphasized the importance of other than formal education. The majority of the respondents were in agreement that no single major or discipline was adequate preparation to conduct programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities. (Author/MP)

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ED171389

PS010593

Survey of Staff Preparation for Infant/Toddler Development Programs

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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The growing interest in early intervention programs for infants and toddlers gained impetus from the results of studies (Gray, 1968; Gordon, 1968; White, 1972; Heber, 1973; Weikart, 1974) which showed improved levels of functioning in infants and young children who were diagnosed as high risk or possessing identifiable disabilities and who had been in a development program. This interest is presently reflected in the proliferation of infant/toddler development programs (ITD) which are being offered by a myriad of community agencies ranging from private preschools to the local "Y". These newly emerging programs are led by individuals with different educational and experential backgrounds. DeLorenzo (1970), Gorelick (1975), Regional Center Nurses Task Force (1976) and Bromwich (1977) have expressed concern about the paucity of research and the lack of consensus among professionals as to the parameters, content and methodology to use in working with individual infants and the parents. They caution that rather than being beneficial to the infant, some inadequately staffed and hurriedly designed programs may, in fact, lead to deleterious effects for the child and, in some instances, for the parents. In this connection, LaCoste (1978) underscores these concerns by noting the difficulties in making precise differential diagnoses at this early age and that a "False diagnosis can be the source of much discomfort for the child's parents... Finally, there is also the fear of possibly harmful effects resulting from the disturbance of the infant-mother relationship during the attachment period." (p. 267)

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[1]The author wishes to express her appreciation to Florence Hironaka, Home Economics graduate student, for her special contribution in the preparation of this survey and to C. Drelicarz and B. Simons for their assistance.

The pressures for early intervention have been supported by the passage of state and federal legislation, e.g. Public Law 94-142 which directs that high risk infants be identified early so as to provide appropriate programs. The increasing emphasis on infant development not only for infants with developmental disabilities but for all infants, stresses the need to address the problem of providing personnel with the expertise to staff and conduct these rapidly expanding programs.

The purpose of the present study was to survey the agencies and individuals presently conducting ITD programs in the Los Angeles County area to determine whether the agencies were operated by public or private organizations; the educational background of the individuals staffing these programs and the respondents' recommendations regarding the educational level, competencies and academic preparation required by individuals desiring careers in the ITD field. It was hypothesized that the input from staff in the field as to the academic preparation persons should be encouraged to pursue, would be useful data for those universities and colleges planning to develop courses of study in the ITD field.

Survey Procedure

A questionnaire developed to obtain the desired information was sent to 186 agencies listed in the Infant Program Directory of the Los Angeles Area; Prenatal and Neonatal Programs in the San Fernando Valley and other agency or institute bulletins believed to be involved in ITD programs. A return self addressed and stamped envelope was included to facilitate the return of the questionnaire.

Results

Seventy-one percent (93) of the total (131) questionnaires returned were considered in the analysis. Thirty-eight (20%) of the questionnaires were incomplete and not used in the study.

Background Information

Those responding were divided almost equally between public (49%) and private (51%) agencies. The type of programs were: Infant Day Care Centers, Child Development Centers, Preschools, Centers for children with disabilities, and Adult Education schools with parent/child programs. A few respondents identified their programs as Mental Health, "Y", Recreation, and University (Table 1).

Table 1. Agency Affiliations of Respondents

Agency	Number Reporting	Percent
Adult Education, Parent/Child programs	16	17
Center for Children with Disabilities	24	26
Mental Health	6	6
Infant Day Care/Child Development Centers/ Preschools	36	39
"Y" Programs/Recreation district	2	2
Others - Regional centers, consulting, universities	9	10

Programs for both infants and toddlers[1] were reported by 57 agencies (61%). Two agencies (2%) reported programs only for infants while 20 agencies (22%) reported programs only for the toddler age group. The enrollment median was 30 children for the agencies reporting the information. Fourteen (15%) reported no direct program but indicated involvement in ITD programs through referrals, supervision and consultations.

The majority of individuals filling out the questionnaires had either four year college (33%) or graduate (60%) degrees. A small group of the respondents held high school diplomas (2%) and community college degrees (5%) as their highest educational degree.

The respondents' degrees were obtained in academic majors ranging from a high of 41% in Education to a low of one percent in Physical Education.

[1]The term infants as used in this paper will refer to children up to one year of age and toddlers will designate children one to two and a half years of age.

When asked, however, with which profession they identified, some of the respondents indicated disciplines other than the ones in which they had majored (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondent's University Major and Declared Profession

	Major		Profession	
	N	%	N	%
Child Development	7	8.5	3	3.0
Education	38	41.0	59	63.0
Home Economics	5	5.0	0	0
Music	2	2.0	0	0
Nursing	6	6.5	7	8.0
Occupational Therapy	6	6.5	4	4.0
Pediatrician	2	2.0	2	2.0
Physical Education	1	1.0	0	0
Physical Therapy	3	3.0	6	7.0
Psychology	12	13.0	4	4.0
Recreation	2	2.0	1	1.0
Social Work	6	6.5	6	7.0
Others - Political Science, Administration, Neonatology	3	3.0	1	1.0

The majority (56%) held staff positions or titles as Directors, Coordinators, and/or Teachers. Twenty percent had staff positions in their particular discipline, e.g. Physical Therapist, Nurse, Social Worker, Psychologist and twenty-three percent held positions in colleges or universities (Table 3).

Table 3. Respondent's Staff Position or Title

Position	Number Reporting	Percent
Directors/administrators/coordinators	29	31
Teachers	23	25
Assistant	1	1
Others (PT, OT, Consultants)	19	20
Colleges and Universities	21	23

The second half of the questionnaire dealt with the respondents recommendations for the preparation and competencies needed to enter the field.

Academic Level

Thirty-five percent of the respondents suggested that the educational background needed by persons wishing to enter the field be a four year college degree and 43% indicated a graduate degree. Thirteen percent selected a two year community college degree. Nine percent chose instead of formal education to fill in the academic level question with "Other" response such as "Loving person," "Caring person," "Affectionate," "Aware of family reactive process..." Some of the respondents wrote similiar comments in addition to selecting a particular academic level.

Credential

Seventy-five percent responded positively to the question that a credential should be required.

Competencies

In answer to the relative importance of a list of "compentencies" which included items such as "Understands physical development; Understands psychological/emotional development; Is knowledgeable about disabilities; Is nuturing of others...", the majority indicated that the listed competencies were "Essential" or "Important."

Preferred Major

The respondents made three choices, first, second and third for the academic major needed to prepare staff for positions in ITD programs. When making their choice, the respondents were asked to consider whether the infants or toddlers were normal or had disabilities. The largest first choice response for normal infants (37%) was the creation of a new major, "Infant Specialist." As their first choice for the academic major for normal toddlers, 26% selected a "Child Development" major and an equal number (26%) chose the "Infant Specialist" major. For children with disabilities an "Interdisciplinary Team" received the most substantial first choice percentages: infants (39%) and toddlers (43%). The "Interdisciplinary Team" selected most frequently consisted of the disciplines of Child Development, Physical Therapy, Psychology, Social Work, Occupational Therapy and Pediatrics.

When preferred majors were analyzed by comparing public or private agencies and position held by the respondents, the greatest number selected (regardless of agency or position) the creation of a new Infant Specialist major as their first choice for normal infants. For normal toddlers, the choices were divided among Education, Infant Specialist and Child Development majors. No matter what their agency affiliation or position, (Table 4) an interdisciplinary team for infants and toddlers with disabilities was recommended most frequently as their first choice of major.

TABLE 4

FIRST CHOICES OF MAJOR COMPARED WITH AGENCIES AND POSITIONS

		NORMAL				DISABILITIES			
		Infants		Toddlers		Infants		Toddlers	
Agencies/Positions	N	Major	%	Major	%	Major	%	Major	%
Private Agencies	47	*IS	43	*Ed	28	*T	30	T	38
				IS	26				
Public Agencies	46	IS	30	*CD	28	T	48	T	48
				IS	26				
Directors	29	IS	45	CD	31	T	28	T	31
				IS	31	IS	24		
Teachers	23	IS	39	IS	30	T	43	T	48
Other	19	CD	32	CD	37	T	42	T	53
University Faculty	21	IS	29	CD	29	T	48	T	48
		CD	24	IN	29				
		T	24						

*IS = Infant Specialist
CD = Child Development
Ed = Education
T = Team

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to query "pioneer practicioners" in the burgeoning infant/toddler development field as to their own educational backgrounds and their recommendations concerning the academic preparation needed to staff these programs in the future.

From this survey, it appears that the individuals presently conducting ITD programs feel the need for more specialized training for those entering the field than they received in their own academic background. This finding agrees with the results of a survey by Bisconti and Solomon (1976) concerning the value of higher education and employment where 49% of the bachelor's degree holders in the study did not see any relationship between education and job. Thus it is understandable that a large number of the respondents

in the present survey preferred in place of their own majors, the creation of a new major, "Infant Specialist," for those wanting to work with normal infants, and a Child Development or Infant Specialist major for those choosing to work with normal toddlers. It is interesting to note that the majority of the respondents were in agreement that no single major or discipline was adequate preparation to conduct programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities. They overwhelmingly selected an interdisciplinary team drawn from different disciplines for children with developmental disabilities. This result corresponds with the establishment in the last decade of a network of University Affiliated Facilities to train interdisciplinary teams to work with individuals with developmental disabilities. There was significant agreement (75%) that a credential should be required to work in ITD programs; however, there was a division of opinion as to whether a four year (35%) or a graduate degree (43%) should be required. In view of this finding it is timely that the experts in family research who are now studying the impact of federal policies on families (as reported by Schaar 1978) address themselves to an examination of the results of ITD programs, the qualifications of persons staffing these programs and their effect on the child and family.

Given that the present survey was limited by sample size, geographical representation and other factors, it is still hoped that the recommendations from individuals currently involved in active ITD programs will be seriously considered by universities and colleges when reviewing their academic offerings to students who wish to pursue careers in the ITD field. Follow up studies of students who declare their desire to work with infants and toddlers should be a continuing process to evaluate the effectiveness of their university education. An on going interchange between the university

and the world of work should aid in the reduction of the common criticism of students that their undergraduate education was not useful or applicable to their career.

Our country's greatest resource is its children. Yet, programs for young children are continually established with little or no monitoring of the preparation of personnel. It is hoped that the same concern shown toward setting standards for the physical facilities which house young children will be displayed in establishing guidelines for the preparation of individuals to staff these emerging programs.

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